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Sikkema: New Michigan Legislature "Truly Historic"

LANSING – Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, today offered the following remarks at the beginning for the 92nd Michigan Legislative Session:

"I rise this afternoon, Mr. President, to offer a few brief thoughts as we begin this new and truly historic session of the Michigan Legislature. First, let me congratulate you personally, Mr. President, and my colleagues for assuming office today. I also want to welcome family, friends, and guests to this first day of session.

"The history we are witnessing and making is startling. Seventy percent of the Senate is composed of members who were not here last session. More than half of the members of the House are new to the Legislature. We have a new Governor and a new Lieutenant Governor, a new Secretary of State, and a new Attorney General. To make life at the State Capitol even more interesting, we take office today with a divided government – at least in terms of partisan labels. We have a Democrat Governor and a Republican Legislature. Challenges confront us immediately – most significantly a very severe and sobering state budget deficit. And we take office today in a national context of economic struggles and even, possibly, war abroad.

"The fundamental question in the minds of those who are watching us in this situation is this: How will they act? What will they do? How will all these new people – some with limited experience, in new positions, with divided government – be successful? Will it work?

"I have an answer: Yes, it will work. It will work because we will seek common ground. We will work together. We will build a common agenda.

"We will do great things in this session because we care about the future of Michigan. We care about the future of Michigan more than we care about being a Republican or a Democrat. We care about Michigan more than we care about being a Senator or a Representative or a Governor. And our love for the state transcends being in the Majority or Minority.

"There will be issues on which we will disagree – and I hope we have a spirited, but civil, debate on those issues. But our opportunity for progress will come if we work together.

"Mr. President, six years ago this very month I rose on the House floor to second the nomination of Curtis Hertel as Speaker of the House. Democrats had just become the majority party in the House and Republicans continued to hold the Senate, as well as the Governor's office. In short, we faced divided government, not unlike what we see today. At the time, I said: "Any party or individual in the House, in the Senate, or in the Executive Office which seeks to dominate purely by position or power rather than by persuasion will surely fail in this environment."

"And that is as true today as it was back then.

"I truly believe that people of good intentions can work together to solve problems if they choose to do so. That is the path I choose.

"Today, I extend my hand in friendship with a desire for cooperation to my Democrat colleagues here in the Senate, to our colleagues, both Republican and Democrat in the House and to our newly elected Democratic Governor.

"Finally, Mr. President, I take on the honor and responsibility of majority leader of this chamber mindful of what the constitution envisions for the Michigan Senate – a place of open and honest debate, a body that gives the perspective of time and insight to issues, and a place that values careful deliberation.

"Again, Mr. President, I congratulate you and my colleagues, and I welcome your families, friends, and guests to this historic day at your state capitol."